

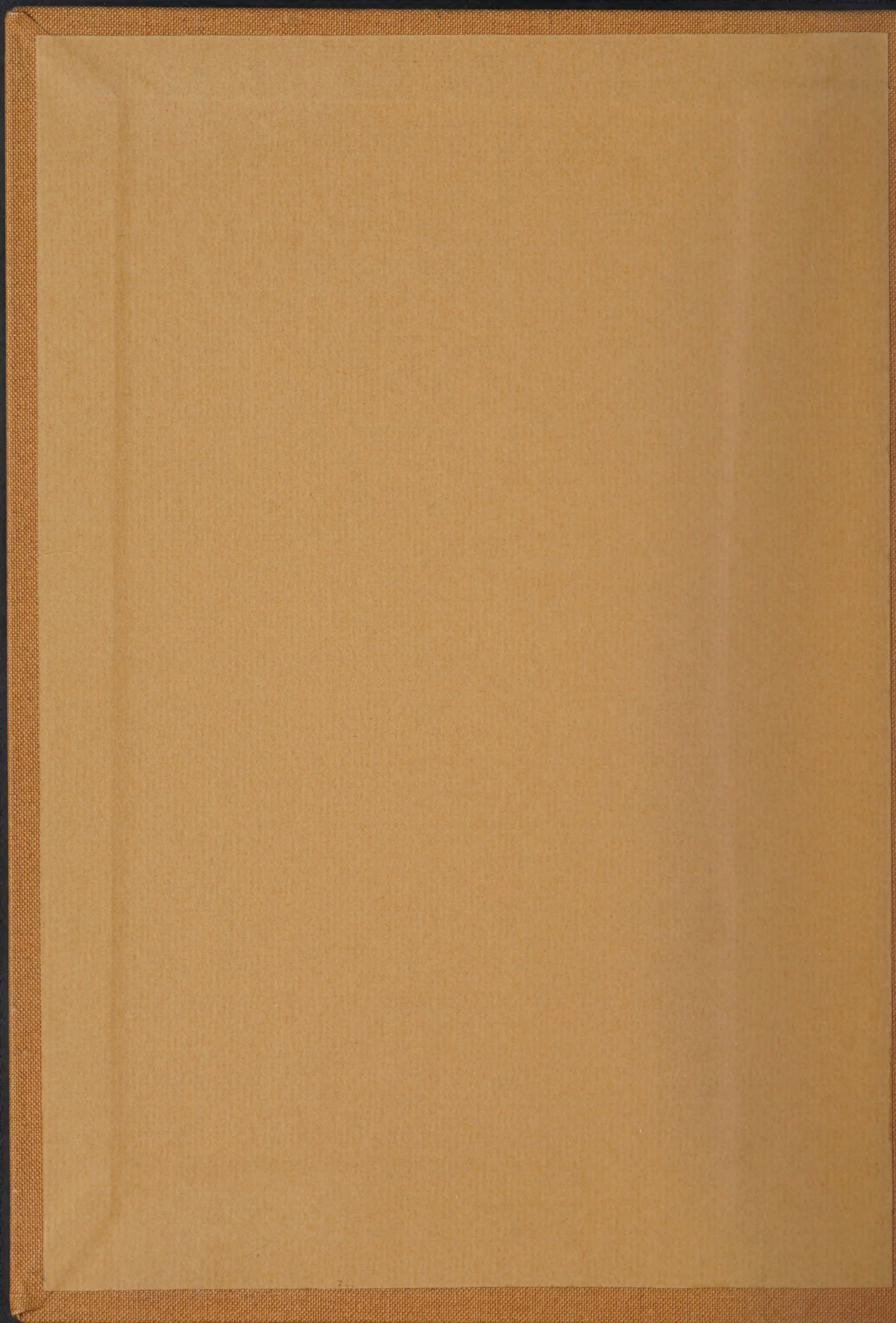
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THOMAS WATTS
A
LETTER TO
ANTONIOIO PANIZZI
1839



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A LETTER
TO
ANTONIO PANIZZI, ESQ.

KEEPER OF THE PRINTED BOOKS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM,

ON THE REPUTED
EARLIEST PRINTED NEWSPAPER,

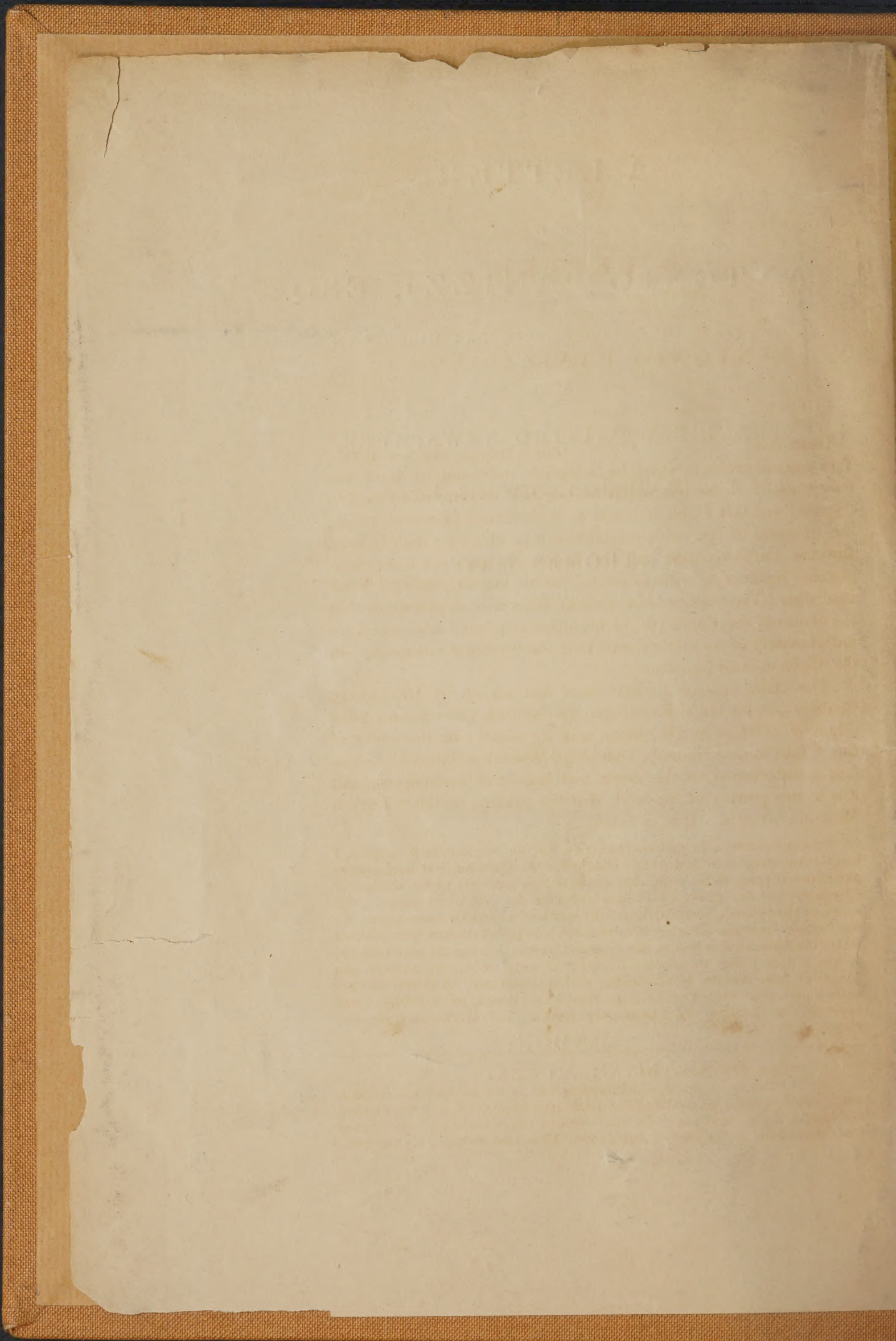
“The English Mercurie, 1588.”

BY THOMAS WATTS,
OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM.



LONDON:
WILLIAM PICKERING.

1839.



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A LETTER

TO

ANTONIO PANIZZI, ESQ.

DEAR SIR,

British Museum, 16th Nov. 1839.

THE nation which is yours by adoption and mine by birth has long claimed an honour which no one has hitherto been found to dispute; and this claim is based on a document preserved among the treasures of the noble establishment to which we both belong. But the English nation and the British Museum are too rich in genuine honours to wish to retain, for an instant, one that is not their due. The object of the present letter is to demonstrate that the claims of the English to the invention of printed newspapers are unfortunately of no validity, and that the "earliest newspaper" in the Museum is an imposture.

The claim appears to have been first set up by Mr. George Chalmers, in his life of Ruddiman, the Scottish grammarian, published in 1794. As Ruddiman was for some time the editor of the "Caledonian Mercury," his biographer takes occasion to enter into a dissertation on the origin and history of newspapers; and it is in this portion of his work that the passage on the "English Mercurie" occurs. It is as follows:

"After inquiring, in various countries, for the origin of news-papers, I had the satisfaction to find what I sought for, in England. It may gratify our national pride to be told, that mankind are indebted to the wisdom of Elizabeth, and the prudence of Burleigh, for the first news-paper. The epoch of the Spanish Armada, is also the epoch of a genuine news-paper. In the British Museum, there are several news-papers, which had been printed while the Spanish fleet was in the English Channel, during the year 1588.(b) It was a wise policy to prevent, during a moment of general anxiety, the danger of false reports, by publishing real information. And the earliest news-paper is entitled THE ENGLISH MERCURIE, which, by *Authority*, 'was imprinted at London, by Christopher Barker, her Highnesses printer, 1588.'(c)

"(b) Sloan MSS. No. 4106."

"(c) The first news-paper, which is preserved, is No. 50, and is in Roman, not in black, letter. It contains the usual articles of news, like the London Gazette of the present day. In that curious paper there are news, dated from Whitehall, on the 23rd of July, 1588. Under the date of July the 26th,

"Burleigh's news-papers were all *Extraordinary Gazettes*, which were published from time to time, as that profound statesman wished, either to inform, or to terrify the people. *The Mercuries* were probably first printed in April, 1588, when the Armada approached the shores of England. After the Spanish ships had been dispersed, by a wonderful exertion of prudence and spirit, these *Extraordinary Gazettes* very seldom appeared. The *Mercurie*, No. 54, which is dated on Monday, November 24th, 1588, informed the public, that the solemn thanksgiving for the successes which had been obtained against the Spanish Armada, was this day strictly observed. This number contains also an article of news from Madrid, which speaks of putting the Queen to death, and of the instruments of torture, that were on board the Spanish fleet. We may suppose, that such paragraphs were designed by the policy of Burleigh, who understood all the artifices of printing, to excite the terrors of the English people, to point their resentment against Spain, and to inflame their love for Elizabeth. (d)

"Yet, are we told, that posts gave rise to weekly news-papers, *which are likewise a French invention*. The inventor was Theophrast Renaudot, a physician, who, laying his scheme before Cardinal Richlieu, obtained from him a patent for *The Paris Gazette*, which was first published in April 1631. Thus would confident ignorance transfer this invention, which is so usefully advantageous to the governors and the governed, from the English Burleigh to the French Richlieu. (e) The dates demonstrate that the pleasures and the benefits of a news-paper were enjoyed in England, more than forty years before the establishment of the *Paris Gazette*, by Renaudot, in France. And the *English Mercurie* will remain an incontestable proof of the existence of a printed news-paper in England, at an epoch, when no other nation can boast a vehicle of news of a similar kind."

The statement thus made, which is copied *verbatim* from Chal-

there is the following notice: 'Yesterday the Scots Ambassador, being introduced by Sir Francis Walsingham, had a private audience of her Majesty, to whom he delivered a letter from the King his master; containing the most cordial assurances of his resolution to adhere to her Majesty's interests, and to those of the Protestant religion. And it may not here be improper to take notice of a wise and spirited saying of this young prince [he was twenty-two] to the Queen's minister at his court, viz. that all the favour he did expect from the Spaniards, was the courtesy of Polypheme to Ulysses, *to be the last devoured*.'—I defy the Gazetteer of the present day, to give a more decorous account of the introduction of a foreign minister. The aptness of King James's classical saying, carried it from the news-paper into history."

"(d) At the end of the *Mercurie*, No. 24, there are advertisements of books, like those of the present times:

'1st. An Admonition to the People of England, wherein are answered the slanderous untruths, reproachfully uttered by Martin Mar-prelate, and others of his *broode*, against the Bishops and chief of the Clergy.

'2nd. The copie of a letter sent to Don Bernardin Mendoza, Ambassador in France, for the King of Spain; declaring the State of England, &c. The second edition.

'3rd. An exact Journal of all Passages at the Siege of Bergan-op-zoom. By an Eye-Witness.

'4th. Father Parsons's Coat well dusted; or short and pithy animadversions on that infamous Fardle of Abuse and Falsities, entitled, *Leicester's Common Wealth*.

'5th. *Elizabetha Triumphans*, an Heroic Poem, by James Aske; with a Declaration how her Excellencie was entertained at the Royal Course at Tilbury, and of the Overthrow of the Spanish Fleet.

'All imprinted and to be sold by John Field and Christopher Barker.'"

"(e) Totze's *Present State of Europe*, vol. i. p. 148; who quotes *Anecdotes Littéraires*, vol. ii. p. 275."

mers, at once attracted considerable attention, and seems to have been received without any further examination whatever. No suspicion appears to have been awakened by the important facts, that such a publication as the *Mercury* is not mentioned in the literary productions of the time; and that a regular rise and growth of primitive political journals might be distinctly traced in the earlier years of the seventeenth century, almost entirely irreconcilable with the supposition that anything in a more perfect form had previously existed. Mr. Nichols, who, in 1794, had transferred the substance of Mr. Chalmers's statement to the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, afterwards incorporated it, with an encomium on the sagacity of the discoverer, in the elaborate account of early newspapers, drawn up by himself, with the assistance of the Rev. Samuel Ayscough, and forming part of the fourth volume of his *Literary Anecdotes*. Mr. D'Israeli, who, in the early editions of his *Curiosities of Literature*, had given an article on the Origin of Newspapers, in which no allusion was made to the English *Mercury*, inserted an account of the alleged discovery, in subsequent editions, almost in the words of Chalmers. An independent account, not taken from the life of Ruddiman, but apparently from a fresh examination of the *Mercury* itself, appeared in the "Concise History of Ancient Institutions, Inventions, &c. abridged and translated from Professor Beckmann, with various important additions," published at London, in two vols., in 1823. From these authorities, it is no wonder the information found its way into the *Cyclopædias*, and other compilations of a similar nature. It is given at some length in the *Encyclopædia Londinensis*, the *Metropolitana*, the new edition of the *Britannica*, and the *British Cyclopædia*, under the head *Newspapers*. The *Conversations-Lexikon* of Brockhaus, and the *Neuestes Conversations-Lexikon* of Wigand, mention it in the article *Zeitung*; the *Dictionnaire de la Conversation et de la Lecture*, under the head *Gazetier*; the great Russian *Entsiklopedicheskii Leksikon*, under that of *Gazeta*. It appears in the *Encyclopædia Americana*, published at New York, and in the new edition of that work, with alterations and improvements, now publishing at Glasgow. In miscellaneous works on origins and inventions, it has generally found a place. Even the circulation given to the statement by these channels is, however, inferior, in all probability, to that it has obtained by the means of newspapers and miscellaneous periodicals, such as Hone's *Year Book*, the *Saturday Magazine*, Chambers' *Edinburgh Journal*, &c. &c. For the last thirty or forty years, it has formed a regular standard article of curious information, and by constant repetition, in and out of season, has been made familiar to almost every desultory reader in the kingdom.

There could hardly, in fact, be any circumstance in literary history, apparently established on a firmer foundation than this. A statement originally made by a respectable authority, and repeated by so many others, was supported by a reference to a docu-

ment preserved, not in a private library, or in one difficult of access, but in the most public, the most easily accessible, the most universally frequented collection in the capital. Any doubt or suspicion that might arise, could be confirmed or dispelled at once by applying for the volume, which was daily within call of hundreds of literary men, both English and foreign.

This document, on which, for nearly half a century, so important a statement has rested undisturbed and unchallenged, is, however, in reality of so very questionable a character, that to see it was to suspect it, and to examine was to detect. On the 4th inst., I was induced to refer to the "English Mercurie," by a consideration respecting it suggested in the article "Armada," in the Penny Cyclopædia. It is there pointed out, that, as the numbers of the Mercury in the Museum are "marked as Nos. 50, 51 and 54, in the corner of the margin, we are to conclude that such publications had occasionally been resorted to at critical times, much anterior to the event of the Spanish Armada." It struck me that the marginal numbers referred to might possibly be merely added in manuscript, in order to facilitate reference. On the book being brought, I had not examined it two minutes, before, to my surprise, I was forced to conclude that the whole was a forgery. I handed it to Mr. Jones, my colleague in the library at the Museum, and he immediately arrived at a similar conclusion. At that instant, you, my dear sir, came up, and I put the volume into your hands, with an inquiry whether you thought that the printing was executed in the year 1588. After a moment's examination, you unhesitatingly declared it impossible. I pointed out the other marks of unauthenticity that I had detected, your hasty inspection supplied still others, and the unaccountably successful imposition of fifty years was shattered to fragments in five minutes. Not a single individual of many who have since examined the "English Mercury" has imagined that the date of 1588 could be at all supported.

The documents of which the credit was thus suddenly and singularly extinguished, are more in number than Mr. Chalmers's statement would lead his readers to imagine, and partly different in kind. They consist altogether of seven distinct articles, three of which are in print and four in manuscript. Each professes to be a number of the English Mercury; but as two of the manuscript articles are duplicates of two of the printed, there are only five distinct numbers of the newspaper. For the convenience of reference, the first seven letters of the alphabet may be used to distinguish the seven different articles, in the order in which they occur in the volume.

A. is a manuscript number of the English Mercury, commencing with the date, Whitehall, July 26th, 1588. In the margin is written, "No. ," but a blank is left for the figures that ought to follow. This, and the other manuscripts, are closely written in

double columns, on sheets of foolscap, of which the writing in general occupies about three sides. The words "Imprinted by Christopher Barker," &c. appear at the end. This number contains the letter from Madrid, respecting the equipment of the Armada, the instruments of torture, &c., which is erroneously referred by Chalmers to the number containing an account of the solemn thanksgiving for its destruction.

B. is the printed English Mercury, No. 50, commencing with the date, "Whitehall, July 23rd, 1588." This, and the other printed numbers, are on quarto sheets, and in the Roman letter, except the title, which is in black letter. The articles of news are each preceded with the name of the place and the date. The size of the type is what is technically called "English."

C. is the printed copy of A., which here bears the number 51. It corresponds in every respect with the manuscript A., except in the spelling. The size of the type of this is also "English."

D. is printed, and bears the number 54. It commences with the date, "Monday, November 24th, 1588." The size of the type is "Small Pica," which is considerably smaller than the "English" used in the two others.

E. is a manuscript commencing with the date, "Whitehall, July 28th, 1588." It is this number which contains the anecdote of the reply of King James to the English ambassador, erroneously quoted by Chalmers as occurring in B., which is in print, while this is in manuscript.

F. is also a manuscript, commencing with news dated "Paris, August 3rd, N. S.," without any previous date.

G. is the manuscript of D., and coincides with it exactly in the spelling, which is not the case with A. and C. A remarkable difference occurs in the date at the commencement, which is here "Monday, November 25th, 1588," instead of November 24th, as in the printed copy. The 24th of November fell on a Sunday.

Having thus given a general statement of the outward appearance of the English Mercury, somewhat different from Mr. Chalmers's, it remains to be shewn what are the reasons for which a conclusion somewhat different from Mr. Chalmers's, has been arrived at respecting its authenticity and value. It is not the first time this gentleman's authority has been questioned; he was, you will remember, one of the staunchest advocates for the genuineness of the notorious Shakspeare Papers.

The first thing that arouses suspicion in the printed numbers, is, as has been already stated, the first thing that catches the eye—the form of the type. Instead of being that of two centuries and a half, it is that of about a century back, the "English fount" in fact bearing a strong resemblance to that in Caslon's Specimens of Type, published in 1766. A single glance at the pages, however, is in this case more efficacious than volumes of description could possibly

be. Their whole appearance decidedly stamps them as having issued from the press in the eighteenth, instead of the sixteenth century. There, is moreover, one peculiar characteristic about the printing, sufficient, if the shape of every letter were ancient, to betray the secret of its modern execution. The distinction between the u's and v's, and the i's and j's, utterly unknown to the printers of the sixteenth century, is here maintained throughout in all its rigour. This circumstance would alone, if others were wanting, be decisive against the supposed antiquity of the printed English Mercuries. In a work, entitled, "A Pack of Spanish Lyes," preserved at the Museum, which was 'imprinted at London, by the Deputies of Christopher Barker, printer to the Queene's most excellent Maiestie,' in the year 1588, the contrast, in this respect, is very great. The spelling in the same work is almost always at variance with that of the English Mercury. The name of the Lord Admiral's ship, which in the "Pack of Spanish Lyes," is spelt the "Arke Royall," is spelt in the Mercury the "Ark Royal." The orthography of those times was indeed capricious and unsettled, but this diversity is somewhat striking.

There is another circumstance about the printed Mercuries of a most suspicious character. Each number, as has been stated, consists of four pages, and the paging runs thus :

In No. 50, page 1—4.

,, 51, ,, 5—8.

,, 54, ,, 1—4.

How is this to be accounted for, except as the oversight of a forger, too careless to pay attention to minor matters? It can hardly be supposed that a fresh volume should begin at No. 50, of all others, and again at No. 54.

The numbering altogether is very mysterious. It does not appear in any of the manuscripts, except No. 54, which, as has been before remarked, presents the last corrections to the printer in spelling, &c. a care not bestowed upon the other manuscript of which there is a printed duplicate. It is evident that E. and F. are intended for Nos. 52 and 53; and it is somewhat remarkable that these five papers, from 50 to 54, should comprise the whole intelligence published to the world by the "crafty Burleigh," from July 23d to November 25th, of this eventful year. In each number the events are narrated with as much particularity as if the Mercury were regularly issued twice or thrice a week at least; and yet we are called on to believe that the interval from "July the last," the date of the latest news in F, to November 24th or 25th, the date of G, was allowed to elapse without a single publication "for the prevention of false reports." Was this interval one of peace, security, and quiet?—It was one of the most interesting for the news-reader in the annals of England. In the early part of it apprehensions were still entertained that the Armada would come up the Thames—and these apprehen-

sions were then dispelled by the tidings of its voyage towards the north, and the crowd of successive disasters which completed its destruction. Is it possible to believe that under these circumstances a statesman, who had already issued fifty-three numbers of a newspaper, four of them in the course of eight days, would allow August, September, October, and almost the whole of November, to pass by without publishing a fifty-fourth? If all the previous numbers of the English Mercury were dealt forth to the public as charily, No. 1 was probably issued by King Harold, "for the prevention of false reports," just before the Conquest.

It is, however, hardly necessary to dwell on these minor and speculative points, when so much conclusive proof remains to be brought forward. It is no less strange than true, that, bound up with these printed Mercuries, which have so long deceived the world, has lain all the while unexamined, in their manuscript duplicates, the most convincing, the most irrefragable evidence that the whole affair is a fraud. That the manuscripts A. and G. are the originals from which the printed copies C. and D. have been taken, is a fact that admits of no question. In all the alterations, and they are numerous, which occur in the manuscripts, the printed copy faithfully follows them, except, as has already been mentioned, in the orthography of one paper. It has been suggested that this may be the case, and yet that the manuscript may not be the original, but a transcript from some earlier printed copy not found or known to exist. But this hypothesis is inadmissible. The alterations in the manuscript are not those of a transcriber, but of an author. They extend not only to the wording, and that in cases where a transcriber could not possibly mistake, but to material points of the statements; to circumstances, numbers and names. They are so very numerous that a transcriber who could perpetrate such a series of blunders must be a moral phenomenon. And lastly, the corrections are, in many cases, themselves corrected; sometimes by a return to the original statement or mode of expression; a circumstance likely enough to occur often in the alterations of an author, but never in the corrections of a copyist. One instance of this is singular. In F. the title was originally written, "*The English Mercury*." A line was drawn through it, and the "*State Intelligencer*," substituted, and this again was afterwards rejected, and the "*English Mercury*" restored. To make the case more evident, however, it may be as well to give a specimen of these alterations at some length. Let us take the letter which has so long passed for a masterpiece of sagacity on the part of the "*crafty Burleigh*."*

* The words in *Italics* are those which have been crossed out in the manuscript; those which follow in *Italics* enclosed between brackets, are those which have been substituted, and again crossed out; those which are in Roman enclosed between brackets, are those that have been finally left for the compositor, and appear in the printed copies.

“ Madrid, July 16th. We have now a certain Acct. that the Duke de Medina sailed from the Groyne the 11th of this month after *having* thoroughly repaired [ing] the Damages [he] sustained in the [late] Storm. The *whole fleet* [invincible Armado (as it is called)] consist of 160 [150] sail *great & small* [of all sorts]—having on board 21700 [21800] *Men* [land forces], the very flower of the Army in Old Spain *besides* [exclusive of] 224 Volunteers of the first quality with their Servants. The Sailors and Galley Slaves *on board* amount to 10,800 Men. *It consists* [the Fleet is composed] of *eight* [6] Squadrons, that of Portugal under the particular *command* [orders] of the Captn. General the D. of Medina Sidonia, that of Biscay commanded by D. Juan de Recalde, that of Andalusia of wch Don Pedro Valdez is Admiral; that of Guiposcoa wch Don Michel Oquendo commands, that of [the] Levantiscas or Eastern ships wch obey the orders of Don *Matt* [Martin] Vertendona, besides the Hulks & Pateches under Lopez de Medina & Antonio de Mendoza, not to mention the Neapolitan and Portugal Gallies commanded by Hugo de Moncada. *These* [all] the number of guns wch They all mount is not less than 3,100 of different weights of *Mettle to enumerate* [tal if one was to set down] the *No of* [quantity] & Proportions of *all* [every] kind of Ammunition & Provision wch is embarked [it] would *seem incredible* [be [be scarce credited] believed] but a *Past* [rt] Particular Account of *this* [the whole] amazing armament wch is in the Press will save me that trouble and convince the most Incredulous. The Design is *publickly* [well] known to be the *Conquest* [Invasion] of England; the whole *nation* [kingdom] is prodigiously interested in the Event of it—there [not] being *scarce* a noble Family wch [but] has *not* some near *Kinsman* [Relation engaged] in the Enterprize: the People are very sanguine abt the Success of it. They think it is impossible that an *Expedition* [Undertaking] sanctified by the *blessing* [benediction] of his Holiness and *intended* [calculated] for so pious an end as the conversion of Hereticks *can* [should] miscarry. *The most intelligent talk of* [Those who should best know] [Those who are best acquainted with] the Politics of this Court talk of nothing less *than* [than the putting the Qns M—y to death] the Entire Reduction of the Island of Gt Britain to the K. of Spain's Obedience & the *entire* extirpation of such hardned Wretches as *will not* [shall refuse to] return into the Pale of the Church. It is certain *sever* tho' not *openly* [publickly] divulged that several Instruments of Torture used in the Inquisition are put on board, and that above 100 Jesuits, Dominicans, mendicant Fryars, with Martin Alasco Vicar of ye Holy Office *on this voyage* are [make the one with] dispersed about the Fleet as *being best* [best] understanding the *use* [application] of such wholesome severities.—*Those* [hey] flatter themselves here that *they* the Conquest of England will be no difficult matter from the divisions in the nation, the hatred which they idly imagine is born towards the Queen [on account of *her* the Qu of Scots Execution] & the want of fortified places & disciplined troops to stop the progress of an Army, when it is once *landed* [put on ashore] [got ashore]. I had almost forgot to add that the Land Forces *on board* [are] made up of 5 [Sp] Regiments & as many from Italy and Portugal, their [chief] Colonels are Don Diego Pimentilli, Don Francis de Toledo, Don Alozo de Luron [*eva*] [uron], Don Nicholas de Isla & the Marquís Augustin Mexia,—amongst the Volunteers are the Prince of Ascoli, the Marquis of Pennafyel and the Marquis of Barcalongo.”

This extract and the mode of proof may be tedious, but surely it establishes the main point, and no one who has read it can believe that the manuscript from which it is taken is other than an original. Our proofs are then clear before us. The handwriting of the manuscript is as modern as the type of the printed copies; *and the spelling is modern spelling*, while in the printed copy it is antiquated. The letter from Madrid, begins thus, in the printed copy C.

"Madrid, July 16. We have now a certaine account that the Duke de Medina sayled from the *Groyne* the 11th of this month, after thoroughly repairinge the damages he sustained in the last storme. The *Invincible Armado* (as it is called) consists of one hundred and fifty saile of all sortes; havinge on boarde twenty-one thousand eight hundred lande forces, the verie flower of the armie in old Spayne, exclusive of two hundred and twenty-four volunteers of the first qualitie, with their servants," &c. &c.

The printer seems in this instance to have taken on himself the task of giving the spelling the proper antique flavour, and not to have succeeded very well. With D. and G. the case is different. There the author has himself taken the pains to disguise his orthography. In the "Advertisements of Bookes," which Chalmers has extracted, the e has been inserted between the k and the s, and in the word "ymprinted," at the bottom of the advertisements, the original initial i has been altered to y. In all the manuscripts of which there are no printed copies, the spelling is left uncorrected. It is entirely modern, therefore, in Chalmers's extract of James's reply to the queen's minister; but the circumstance seems to have escaped the observation of Chalmers, and of all who copied him. To the modern character of the writing and the spelling, a third anachronism remains to be added; the paper on which the manuscript is written bears the watermark of the royal arms, with the initials "G. R."

The whole style of composition observable in the *Mercury*, is, like every thing else about it, of a much later date than that to which it pretends. Mr. Chalmers defies, and with reason, the "Gazetteer of the present day to give a more decorous account of the introduction of a foreign minister," than the writer of this earliest of English Gazettes. "It is very curious," remarks Dr. Lieber, in the *Encyclopædia Americana*, "to observe how much the mode of communicating certain articles of intelligence in these early papers resembles the forms in use at present." It is more than curious; it is wonderful. The general impression left on the mind by the perusal of the *Mercury* is, that it must have been written after the *Spectator*. To investigate the rise and progress of particular words, phrases and modes of expression, demands a degree of research which would be misapplied on the present occasion; but two observations of the kind which have presented themselves ought not to be passed over. The "*Mercury*" speaks of "Regiments," as if the phrase were perfectly familiar to English ears; but Hakluyt, in 1598, writing of the Spanish Armada, is not of the same opinion. "There were," he says, (translating Van Meteren, with a slight alteration) "in the said nauie five *terzaes* of Spaniards (which *terzaes* the Frenchmen call regiments)." The "Advertisements of Books, like those of the present times," quoted by Mr. Chalmers, are an instance of anticipation both in the word and the thing. In Richardson's Dictionary, no instance is given of the use of the word in this peculiar sense an-

terior to the Tatler. Nichols, in his account of newspapers, after having quoted Chalmers's discovery of the English Mercury, tells us, some few pages further on, as a discovery of his own, that No. 7 of the Impartial Intelligencer, which commenced in March, 1648-9, contains the first regular advertisement, which is "from a gentleman at Candish, in Suffolk, respecting two horses which had been stolen from him." He had either not observed, or had forgotten, the far more remarkable advertisements for books in the all-anticipating English Mercury.

One of the most searching of tests remains to be applied. It is yet to be seen how far the statements of historical events in the English Mercury correspond with those of historians respecting whose authority there is no room for doubt. The first article of intelligence in the Mercury will serve the purpose :

" Whitehall, July 23d 1588.

" Earlie this Morninge arrived a Messenger at Sir Francis Walsingham's Office with Letters of the 22d from the Lorde High Admirall on board the *Ark-Royal*, containinge the followinge materiall Advices.

" On the 20th of this Instant Capt. *Fleming*, who had beene ordered to cruize in the chops of the Channell, for Discoverie, brought Advice into *Plymouth*, that he had descried the *Spanish Armado* neare the *Lizard*, making for the Entrance of the Channell with a favourable Gale. Though this Intelligence was not receeived till near foure in the Afternoone, and the Winde at that time blew hard into the *Sound*, yet by the indefatigable Care and Diligence of the Lorde High Admiral, the *Ark-Royal*, with five of the largest Frigates, anchored out of the Harbour that very Evening. The next morninge, the greatest Part of her Majestie's Fleet gott out to them. They made in all about eighty Sail, divided into four Squadrons, commanded by his Lordship in Person, Sir *Francis Drake* Vice-Admiral, and the Rear-Admirals *Hawkins* and *Forbisher*. But about one in the Afternoone, they came in Sight of the *Spanish Armado* two Leagues to the Westward of the *Eddystone*, sailing in the Form of a half Moon, the Points whereof were seven Leagues asunder. By the best computation, that could be made on the sudden (which the Prisoners have since confirmed) they cannot be fewer than one hundred and fifty Ships of all Sorts; and severall of them called Galleons and Galleasses, are of a Size never seene before in our Seas, and appeare on the Surface of the Water like floatinge Castles. But the Sailors were so far from being daunted by the Number and Strengthe of the Enemie, that as soon as they were discerned from the top-mast-Head, Acclamations of Joy resounded through the whole Fleete. The Lord High Admirall observing this generall Alacritie, after a Council of War had been held, directed the Signall of Battle to be hung out. We attacked the Enemy's Reare with the Advantage of the Winde: The Earle of *Cumberland* in the *Defiance* gave the first fire: my Lord Howard himselfe was next engaged for about three Hours with Don *Alphonso de Leyva*, in the *St Jaques*, which would certaynly have struck, if she had not been seasonably rescued by *Ango de Moncada*. In the meane tyme, Sir *Francis Drake* and the two Rear-Admirals *Hawkins* and *Forbisher*, vigorously broad-sided the Enemies sternmost Ships commanded by Vice-Admiral *Recalde*, which were forced to retreat much shattered to the maine Body of their Fleete, where the Duke de *Medina* himselfe commanded. About Sun-set we had the pleasure of seeing the invincible *Armado* fill all their sails to get away from us. The Lord Admirall slackned his, in order to expect the Arrivall of twenty fresh Frigates, with which he intendes to pursue the Enemie, whom we hope by the Grace of God to prevent from landinge one Man on *English* Grounde. In the night the *St. Francis* Galleon, of which Don *Pedro de Valdez* was Captaine, fell in with Vice-Ad-

mirall *Drake*, who tooke her after a stout Resistance. She was disabled from keepinge up with the rest of the Fleete, by an Accident which happened to her, of springing her Fore-maste. She carryes fifty Guns and five hundred men, both Souldiers and Mariners. The Captours found on board five thousand Golde Ducats, which they shared amongst them after bringing her into *Plymouth*."

The dates in this intelligence are worthy of observation; they are truly remarkable. Early in the morning of July the 23rd, arrives at Whitehall a messenger with letters of July 22nd, from the Lord High Admiral. Where then is the Lord High Admiral? Out at sea in the *Ark Royal*, so situated that he can give intelligence from *Plymouth* on the morning of the 22nd. For it will be noticed, that the "*St. Francis Galleon*, of which Don Pedro Valdez was captain," is taken, according to the Admiral's account, by Sir Francis Drake, on the night of the 21st, and afterwards brought into *Plymouth*, and the prize money shared among the men, which, considering all things, could hardly have taken place before early in the morning of the 22nd. Here then we have a piece of news conveyed from *Plymouth* to London, a distance of 215 miles, in four-and-twenty hours; a degree of rapidity in conveyance which fairly equals the rapidity in sharing the prize money, and which, before the invention of telegraphs, steamboats, and railways, might, one would think, have excited the astonishment and admiration of any Gazetteer. Having thus examined the statement by its own light, let us see how far it corresponds with the relations of contemporary historians. Unluckily for himself the Gazetteer has chosen for his narration a portion of time, of which there are in existence more minute records than perhaps of any other equally remote;—quite minute enough, at least, to demonstrate how much at variance with truth is the statement he has attributed to the Lord High Admiral. To search the Cottonian manuscripts, or other recondite documents is needless; the common accounts of the night of the 21st and of the day following are amply sufficient. On that night, Meteren* informs us, Drake, far from doing good service, was committing an act which nearly led to the destruction of the Admiral. "Sir Francis Drake," says Hakluyt in his translation, "(who was, notwithstanding, appointed to beare out his

* It is from Meteren's *History of the Low Countries*, published in 1597 in Latin, that Hakluyt's account of the Spanish Armada is entirely taken, as he himself informs us. Grimeston, another writer who often passes for an original authority on the subject, acknowledges, in the dedication to his "*Generall Historie of the Netherlands*," that he has chiefly followed "John Francis Petit, an Authour yet living, and residing in our London." By a comparison of Grimeston and Petit's accounts it has been found, however, that there are large additions in the translation, chiefly taken from Meteren. It is curious that the first edition of the latter, from which Hakluyt translated, should have escaped the notice of the bibliographer Ebert. There is a copy in the Museum.

lanterne that night) was giuing of chase unto five great Hulkes which had separated themselves from the Spanish Fleete, but finding them to be Easterlings he dismissed them. The lord Admirall all that night following the Spanish lanterne instead of the English, found himselfe in the morning to be in the midst of his enimies Fleete, but when he perceived it hee cleanly conveyed himself out of that great danger." The same account is given by Speed and Grimeston, but the story is so confusedly told in Camden, that any one manufacturing a newspaper account from his statement might easily be led into error. "The day folowing, which was the two and twentie of July," continues Hakluyt, "Sir Francis Drake espied Valdez his shippe, whereunto hee sent foorth his pinasse," and a minute account is given of the capture of Valdez, who, far from making a "stout resistance," surrendered without striking a blow. We afterwards learn, that the Admiral having in the morning been "left alone in the enimies Fleete" in advance of the English, "it was foure of the clocke at afternoone before the residue of the English Fleet could ouertake him." The contradictions here are almost too numerous to be counted. If we are to consider the Mercury authentic, the Admiral must have forgotten, in his despatches, every event worth recording—the neglect of Drake, the night of unconscious peril, the startling discovery of the morning, and finally the separation from his own fleet during nearly the whole of the very day of the date of the letter!

With this instance our historical proofs of the spuriousness of the English Mercury have begun, and with this they may end. It is hardly worth while, after this series of blunders in one article, to mention even that Sir Francis Vere is called Sir Francis some months before he was knighted, and made a noted character before he had done his earliest celebrated feat of arms.

Who was the forger? This question must be left to time and the curious. The papers came into the Museum in 1766, the year of the decease of Dr. Birch, to whose collection they belonged, and not to that of Sir Hans Sloane, as erroneously stated by Chalmers. It cannot for a moment be supposed that Dr. Birch was accessory to the deception; his character wholly forbids it, and the circumstance that the "bane and antidote," the printed part and the manuscript are both found to have been placed together, seems to shew that he took reasonable care that others should not be deceived. The most plausible conjecture as to their origin and preservation appears to be, that the printed copies were got up for the purpose of imposition; that the attempt was detected; and that the whole of the papers were preserved as a memorial of the occurrence. Of the literary forgers of that period, there are three towards whom suspicion may be directed. If Chatterton were any one else but Chatterton, he might be dismissed as too young; but in 1766 he was fourteen, and wanted neither the will nor the wit

to execute more ingenious forgeries than this. Were the papers manuscript only, suspicion might rest on him; but he had not the power at that time to effect the execution of printed fabrications. In 1766 George Steevens was thirty, and in that year he commenced his literary career as a commentator on Shakspeare. His habits and propensities were such, that his name is the first that occurs to any one making inquiry into a case of literary deception. But the handwriting of the manuscript *Mercuries* does not appear to be feigned, and it is not neat enough, though not deficient in neatness, for the hand of George Steevens. The year 1766 was that of the decease of William Rufus Chetwood, the individual to whom Mr. Rodd of Newport-street, whose knowledge of literary history and anecdote is well known, was inclined to refer the fabrication of the *Mercuries*. Chetwood was concerned in a work called "the British Theatre, containing the lives of the English Dramatic Poets, with an account of all their Plays," a great part of which is an impudent farrago of forgery and falsehood, which has unhappily succeeded in deceiving many later writers on the subject. He appears, like your Italian Doni, to have had quite a mania for the invention of fictitious titles and fictitious editions; and the former have a peculiar style, which Mr. Rodd thought he recognised in the advertisements of books in the *Mercury*. But the conjecture is negatived, as in the case of Steevens, by the dissimilarity of the handwriting.

Another error on the subject of the origin of newspapers remains to be noticed. "The first gazette published in these parts," we are told in Chambers's and in Rees's *Cyclopædia*, "is said to have been that of Paris, begun in the year 1631 by Theophrast Renaudot, a physician of Montpellier, in his office of intelligence." The same assertion is attributed by Chalmers and the *Encyclopædia Londinensis* to Horace Walpole, is mentioned in the *Encyclopædia Metropolitana*, and is considered by all three as confuted by the discovery of the English *Mercury*. How this should have been necessary to confute it is not very obvious, since in all the accounts of the origin of newspapers, of any length, those of the above three authorities included, a list is given of several which appeared in England long before the date of 1631. To prove that the Paris Gazette was not the first, there needs in fact no further authority than the Paris Gazette itself. The very first sentence of the dedication to the king, prefixed to the first volume, states* that "it is a remark worthy of history, that France, so curious after novelties, should

* "C'est bien une remarque digne de l'histoire que dessous soixante-trois Roys, la France, si curieuse de nouveautez, ne se soit point avizee de publier la Gazette ou recueil par chacune semaine des nouvelles tant domestiques qu'estrangeres, à l'exemple des autres Estats, et mesme de tous ses voisins." "La publication des Gazettes est à la verité nouvelle mais en France seulement."

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never, under sixty-three kings, have thought of publishing a Gazette or weekly collection of foreign and domestic news, in the same manner as other states and *as all its neighbours*." "The publication of Gazettes," adds the preface in the first page, "is indeed a novelty *but in France only*." Never was an unfounded report so easily and completely demolished, except, perhaps, in a parallel case, so curious that it should not be omitted. The Gentleman's Magazine unaccountably passes for the first periodical of that description, while, in fact, it was preceded nearly forty years by the Gentleman's Journal of Motteux, a work much more closely resembling our modern magazines, and from which Sylvanus Urban borrowed part of his title and part of his motto;—and while on the first page of the first numbers of the Gentleman's Magazine itself, it is stated, that it contains "more than *any book of the kind and price*."

The claims of France and England to the invention of printed newspapers are now disposed of. It is to Italy and to Germany, to Venice and to Nuremberg, that the battle apparently belongs. To decide their conflicting claims must be the task of the future inquirer into the rise and progress of periodical literature, a portion of literary history indisputably one of the most interesting and one of the most obscure. The noble collection of periodicals of all ages and of all countries, which, under your superintendence, is rapidly accumulating at the Museum, will supply him with a fund of the most valuable materials: even the few facts embodied in these pages could not have been brought together without their aid. These facts were thought by you of sufficient importance to deserve being given to the public in a separate form. Your wish has been carried into effect: and I must now request you to gratify one of mine, in allowing me to honour these pages with your name, and to offer them to you as a slight and insufficient token of the respect with which

I am,

Dear Sir,

Yours most sincerely,

THOMAS WATTS.

C. Whittingham, Took's Court, Chancery Lane.

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